

Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Vigil Mass, December 31st 2017

Today is the Octave of Christmas, the Solemnity of Mary – the Holy Mother of God. As we remember the ancient blessing God gave the Israelites through the Aaronic Priesthood we can appreciate how these words are fully realized in the incarnation. These are words Jewish priests repeated over many centuries.

The LORD bless you and keep you:

²⁵ *The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:*

²⁶ *The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

To know the blessing of God is to know his favour and grace. At the very beginning of Genesis, after the creation of the man and the woman, God's very first act is to bless them. We read:

“And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply”

The rest of the Biblical narrative is the story of the unfolding of this blessing. A blessing so filled with fecundity but alas also filled with much rotten fruit because of the blight of sin. And so because of sin the blessing now needs to also announce God's redemptive love. Therefore it needs to become even more specific. This it does with the priestly blessing Aaron and his sons will pronounce. It is no longer “be fruitful and multiply”. Now it is:

The LORD bless you and keep you:

²⁵ *The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:*

²⁶ *The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

We know from the Old Testament that Moses could not look on the face of God and live. And yet here the face and countenance of God are pronounced as the fruit of this blessing so that the people may know the graciousness of God and his peace.

To know his graciousness is to know his mercy. To know his peace is to have restored to us the original blessing and favour announced in Genesis 1 by living orderly lives in relation to God, the created world, one another and ourselves.

This is where there is a connection between the original blessing of Genesis 1, the Aaronic blessing of the Book of Numbers, and the Feast we celebrate today. In Genesis God's blessing focusses on the fruitfulness that will result from conjugal love. The Aaronic blessing points to the fruitfulness that will result from the encounter of the Divine and human love that blesses Mary with a most unique and singular fecundity – the vocation to be the Mother of God. In her choosing to say yes to God, the Aaronic blessing now literally comes to life because the face of the Lord will first shine in the loving exchange between mother and son and then his face will shine through his private years and the public ministry of those three years when in his early 30s. Then during Holy Week, his beaten and bruised countenance will be on display for all to see

from the Cross. But from the Cross we go to the empty tomb of Easter where is declared that the blight of sin that wants to spoil life's fruitfulness has been defeated so that we can spend the rest of our earthly lives learning to live now as members of this Family of Redemption. It is in this family that our Blessed Mother plays such a key role. It is this family, now the living expression of Aaron's blessing, that St. Paul so clearly refers to when he says of our family identity.

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"⁷ So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

As members of the family of Redemption, today we uniquely honour Mary because it was from her womb and from the blessing of her hands that cared for, nurtured and raised our Saviour. Mary uniquely pronounced and continues to pronounce the Aaronic blessing because she is the one who is always showing us the face of Jesus.

The Collect for today's Mass expresses her maternal vocation beautifully as a fulfillment of this Aaronic Blessing when we prayed:

God, who by the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary, bestowed upon the human race the grace of eternal salvation:

Gabriel used careful and prudent language when he announced Jesus birth. He did not speak of "what will be born *in you*" to avoid the impression that a body would be introduced into her womb from outside; he spoke of "what will be born *from you*" so that we might know by faith that her child originated within her and from her so as to open to us the reward of eternal salvation.

As we think today about Mary the Mother of God we are thankful that God's original blessings of fruitfulness needed our blessed Mother's yes so that through her being blessed we in turn could be blessed.

Mary pray for us so that we may see ever more clearly the face of the Lord Jesus whose gracious mercy is the source of our life and the basis of our peace.